United States Department of Agriculture **Forest Service** **Southwestern Region Forest Health Arizona Zone Office**

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Subject: Proposed FY2005 Big Saddle Forest Vegetation Restoration Implementation Project, North Kaibab Ranger District (northkaibabrd)

To: District Ranger, North Kaibab Ranger District

This letter serves as an evaluation for the proposed FY 2005 Big Saddle Forest Vegetation Restoration Implementation Project submitted by you and Tim Howard, Silviculturist. I met with Ed Kolle, Forester, and evaluated the proposed area on October 19, 2004. The proposal was submitted to cover the costs associated with precommercial thinning of understory conifers and hand piling and pile burning of slash on the 565-acre project area. The Big Saddle project area is included in the nearly complete categorical exclusion for Big Saddle, Little Mountain, and West Lake Analysis. During the analysis, it was recognized that stands were grossly overstocked and the precommercial component needed treatment.

There are 4 units in the Big Saddle area identified for treatment. All are composed mainly of ponderosa pine with basal areas greater than 180 square feet. Although all units have at least a small component of gambell oak, Units 1 and 4 have a large oak component. Unit 3 has a small aspen clone. Current vegetative conditions are markedly different from historic conditions; with excessive pine tree densities in the understory. These sites have not had any prescribed fire activity, and they escaped the Bridger-Knoll fire of 1996. The last harvest entry was over 30 years ago and consisted of a light selection cut in the overstory. The mature trees are showing signs of stress due to overstocking of the understory and the longterm drought the area has been under. All sites have recent mortality with signs of western pine beetle. There is some dwarf mistletoe infected pine along the edge of one unit.

The primary objective for the Big Saddle project is to promote the health and longevity of overstory trees by reducing competition and decreasing live fuel levels. Some sites have been identified as either existing or replacement nest stands for the northern goshawk. Silvicultural treatments are aimed at reducing the density of trees <9”dbh. In units 1 and 2 the district will use their “Designation by Description” method in which an overstory tree of a certain diameter size is cleared of understory trees (<9”dbh) for a specific distance around that tree. For example, an 18”dbh tree will have the understory cleared around it for 36ft., but a 12”dbh tree would get a 12ft. clearing. Areas outside mature ponderosa pine groups will be thinned according to the goshawk guidelines.

Existing mature ponderosa pines and stump evidence in units 2 and 3 indicate these areas were more open meadows than dense forests. The proposed prescription is to cut all trees <9”dbh to restore these units to a more open condition.

Treatments will not normally occur between January 1 and July 1 in order to reduce potential impact from *ips* engraver bark beetles in associated slash. The District also proposes to perform

monitoring activities during treatment to insure project objectives are met. This project should decrease the risk of bark beetles attacking mature ponderosa pine, thereby increasing the longevity of these valuable pines.

/s/ Mary Lou Fairweather
MARY LOU FAIRWEATHER
Forest Pathologist, Forest Health,
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cc: Ed Kolle, Richard D Madril, Debra Allen-Reid, John Anhold, James A Hall